



Ambedkar's Writings and Dalit Sensitivities: Voice, Suffering, and Repressed Emotions

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Abstract— This paper examines the intersections of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's structural, political, and philosophical writings with the interiority of Dalit sensitivities. While scholarship frequently emphasizes Ambedkar's legalism and constitutionalism, this study investigates how his oeuvre anchors the emotional landscape of the subaltern—specifically focusing on the articulation of institutionalized suffering, collective trauma, and repressed emotions. By close-reading foundational texts like *Annihilation of Caste*, *The Untouchables*, and his autobiographical notes in *Waiting for a Visa*, this paper maps the transition of Dalit consciousness from silent, internalized humiliation to an organized, confrontational socio-political voice. The paper argues that Ambedkar's writing functions not merely as political theory, but as an affective archive that legitimizes Dalit grief and translates visceral anger into structured emancipatory grammar.



Keywords— Ambedkar, Dalit Sensitivities, Repressed Emotions, Trauma, Affect Theory, Subaltern Voice.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF AMBEDKARISM

Scholarly engagements with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar primarily position him as a jurist, constitutional architect, and socio-political reformer. While these designations are indisputably accurate, they occasionally obscure the deeply visceral, emotional, and phenomenological underpinnings of his intellectual project. Ambedkar's writings do not operate solely within cold, detached legal frameworks; they are profoundly attuned to what can be termed *Dalit sensitivity*—the unique matrix of psychological vulnerability, historical trauma, and systemic humiliation experienced by those relegated to the nadir of the caste hierarchy.

This paper explores how Ambedkar's texts serve as an archive of repressed emotions, an anatomy of institutionalized suffering, and a catalyst for subaltern voice. In doing so, it bridges political philosophy with affect theory, illustrating that the destruction of the caste system required both structural reorganization and a psychological resurrection of the self.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRAUMA, AFFECT, AND THE SUBALTERN

To understand the emotional depth of Dalit sensitivities, it is necessary to deploy lenses from both Subaltern Studies and Affect Theory.

- **Systemic Humiliation:** Unlike occasional or situational trauma, caste-based humiliation is existential and continuous. It is a form of violence that penetrates everyday interactions, spatial structures, and bodily topographies.
- **Repressed Emotions:** Centuries of enforced untouchability conditioned the oppressed to internalize their degradation. Fear, grief, and indignation were historically repressed because their overt expression invited lethal retributive violence from dominant castes.
- **The Ambedkarite Shift:** Ambedkar intervenes in this historical impasse by providing a vocabulary for these repressed affects. He transforms what was treated as an unalterable cosmic fate into a historicized, political injustice.

III. THE ANATOMY OF SUFFERING: TEXTUAL MANIFESTATIONS

3.1 *Waiting for a Visa*: The Phenomenology of Exclusion

In his autobiographical fragments collected in *Waiting for a Visa*, Ambedkar moves away from macroeconomic data to detail the raw, localized reality of untouchability. The narrative is heavy with the affective weight of vulnerability.

Consider his recollection of a childhood journey to Koregaon, where he and his siblings were stranded at a railway station because no cart-driver would carry them upon discovering their Mahar identity. The text highlights a specific emotional mutation: the sudden transition from innocent childhood anticipation to crushing, alienating shame. Ambedkar writes:

"This picture of helplessness and loneliness has remained vivid in my memory... It was then for the first time that I knew I was an Untouchable, and what Untouchability meant."

Here, suffering is not an abstract sociological category. It is the physical experience of thirst in the scorching heat, the somatic shock of being treated as a pollutant, and the psychological realization that one's very existence inspires revulsion.

3.2 *Annihilation of Caste*: Anger as an Intellectual Force

If *Waiting for a Visa* documents grief and vulnerability, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) is a masterclass in intellectualized rage. Originally written as a speech for the *Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal*, the text systematically dismantles the spiritual defense of caste.

Ambedkar's tone in this work is deliberately uncompromising. He targets the emotional complicity of the privileged, stating that the upper-caste Hindus have "sacrificed most precious moral values" to preserve their social status. By treating the Hindu scriptures (*Shastras* and *Smritis*) not as divine revelations but as blueprints for institutionalized cruelty, Ambedkar liberates the Dalit reader from the psychological guilt of religious transgression. The text validates the reader's repressed anger, transforming it into an analytical tool to deconstruct sacred hegemony.

IV. VOICE VS. SILENCE: BREAKING THE CULTURE OF DEFERENCE

For centuries, Dalit sensitivity was characterized by an enforced "culture of deference"—a behavioral code where the oppressed had to perform their own inferiority through language, dress, and posture. Ambedkar understood that true emancipation required the total eradication of this psychological submissiveness.

Through his newspapers—*Mooknayak* (The Leader of the Dumb), *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Excluded India), and *Janata* (The People)—Ambedkar directly challenged this silence. The title *Mooknayak* itself is a profound commentary on affect; it recognizes the existence of a voice that has been violently muted.

Periodical	Year Launched	Core Affective/Political Focus
Mooknayak	1920	Articulating the silence of the voiceless; establishing a distinct subaltern identity.
Bahishkrit Bharat	1927	Countering right-wing narratives; documenting active civic protests (e.g., Mahad Satyagraha).
Janata	1930	Broadening the struggle into a collective, democratic demand for labor and human rights.

Ambedkar's writings within these periodicals acted as a mirror, showing the Dalit community that their suffering was neither natural nor divinely ordained, but a human construct designed for economic and social exploitation.

V. FROM PATHOS TO ETHOS: THE MAHAD SATYAGRAHA AS TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

The Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, where Ambedkar led Dalits to drink water from the Chardar Tank, was both a political protest and a massive socio-emotional performance. The speech he delivered at Mahad, later canonized in Dalit political thought, explicitly shifts the narrative from *pathos* (appealing to the pity of the oppressor) to *ethos* (asserting the fundamental dignity of the self).

Ambedkar argued that the protest was not merely about water, but about establishing human equality. He declared:

"We are not going to the Chardar Tank to merely drink water... We are going to the Tank to assert that we too are human beings like others."

By framing the access to a basic natural resource as an assertion of ontological equality, Ambedkar altered the internal emotional landscape of his followers. The act of drinking water became a ritual of psychological rebirth, breaking the internal taboo of pollution that had kept Dalit emotions repressed for generations.

VI. THE ULTIMATE SUBVERSION: NAVAYANA BUDDHISM AND EMOTIONAL LIBERATION

The culmination of Ambedkar's engagement with Dalit sensitivity is his final act: the mass conversion to Buddhism in 1956, formalized in his posthumously published magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

Ambedkar recognized that as long as Dalits remained within the metaphysical framework of Hinduism, their self-perception would always be tainted by the concept of inherited sin (*Karma*) and existential impurity. Conversion to *Navayana* (Neo-Buddhism) was fundamentally an act of emotional and spiritual purging.

By rejecting the Hindu pantheon through his 22 vows, Ambedkar systematically excised the sources of religious guilt and inferiority. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* reconstructs Buddhism not as an ascetic retreat from reality, but as an active social ethic centered on *Karuna* (compassion) and *Pradnya* (understanding). This shifted the emotional anchor of Dalit sensitivity from a locus of shame and alienation to one of dignity, brotherhood (*Maitri*), and cosmic equality.

VII. CONCLUSION: THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings do far more than outline legal clauses or policy directives; they map the complex contours of the subaltern heart. They capture the historical sighs of millions and translate them into a vibrant, unyielding grammar of dissent.

By archiving Dalit suffering, validating repressed anger, and constructing new pathways for spiritual and emotional liberation, Ambedkar laid the intellectual foundation for the modern Dalit literary movement and political consciousness. His works remain a living archive, reminding us that social justice is incomplete without the restoration of psychological dignity and the complete liberation of the repressed self.

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